

future, is this the pattern of development that we want for our country? Do we want to live this way?

□ 1245

Increasingly, Americans from coast to coast, border to border are speaking out and suggesting that is not their desired approach. Citizens are taking matters into their own hands on State and local levels with initiatives to try and improve the quality of life. They know that there are better ways of spending our tax dollars, that just because we have failed in the past in comprehensive planning is no suggestion that we should not try and do a better job of planning in the future, and just because the government has not always been constructive in efforts that it has undertaken does not mean that there is not a role for the government to be a constructive partner in the future.

It does us no good to pretend that we do not have problems of growth and quality of life in our communities. The citizens know that that is the case. The evidence is overwhelming. Now is the opportunity for us, under the banner of making our communities more livable, to engage the government as a constructive partner, to plan thoughtfully for the future involving our communities, spending our infrastructure dollars more wisely and engaging in a new generation of environmental protection that is performance driven.

I look forward to the day when we can get away from the wrong turns of this debate and get back to a productive discussion of how we can work together to make our communities more livable.

#### IN SUPPORT OF REPEALING HOUSE RULE XXIII

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. REGULA). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, today I will be introducing legislation to require a separate vote before we raise the debt ceiling.

A lot of my colleagues will ask, why is this legislation necessary? Because often we allow the practice of raising the debt ceiling, the debt limit, to continue without a recorded vote. It is hidden within the budget resolution and passes without notice and, of course, without a vote.

Initially, this rule was added in the 96th Congress by public law and was originally applicable to concurrent resolutions on the budget for fiscal years beginning on or after October 1, 1980.

The rule was amended in the 98th Congress to reflect the enactment into law of a new permanent rather than temporary debt limit. The rule ties a passage of a concurrent budget resolution to an increase or a decrease in the limit of the public debt.

Legislation to repeal Rule XXIII would simply force Congress to vote separately on any increase in the public debt limit. Repealing this rule would simply force a floor vote on an increase or a decrease in the public debt; and this is a positive move, I think, for all of Americans.

Again I pose the question: Why is this so important we have such a vote? If we do not pass and repeal this Rule XXIII, we will continue to raise the debt limit with no type of accountability.

I would like to share with my colleagues some statistics that I think will help them to understand the relevance of what I am talking about.

In 1994, the debt ceiling of the United States Treasury was about \$49 billion, and we had a population then of about 132 million people. That is roughly about \$370 per person. Our population today is about 276 million people, and our debt now is approaching \$6 trillion. That is about \$22,450 per person.

In the 58 years since 1940, the U.S. population has doubled. Yet the debt ceiling has risen to about 121 times its 1940 level.

Now, when we start to talk about almost \$6 trillion, that kind of figure is beyond the understanding of most of us. If we put it in inches, it is the distance from the earth to the sun. In terms of the population of all of the earth, it is about \$1,000 for every person. It is a huge amount of money.

Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues know, House Rule XXIII stipulates, "upon the adoption by Congress of any concurrent resolution, the enrolling clerk of the House of Representatives shall prepare an engrossment of a joint resolution, increasing or decreasing the statutory limit on the public debt."

In other words, simply passing a budget subsequently raises the public debt limit. There are no votes on the matter, no floor debates, no nothing. Rule XXIII simply states that a vote for the budget "shall be deemed to have been a vote in favor of" raising the public debt limit.

It is way too easy here today and far too painless for us on the House floor to raise this public debt. It should not be easy, and it should not be painless, and we should have full debate. In fact, it should be very difficult; and, at the very least, it should be a publicly debated matter with a record vote.

So, Mr. Speaker, to remedy this situation I have this legislation which I will be dropping this morning; and I urge all of my colleagues to support it and just to call my office if they would like to be a cosponsor.

#### PHONEY POLITICAL DEFINITION OF "BALANCED BUDGET"

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. METCALF) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. METCALF. Mr. Speaker, we have all heard that we have now done it. We have balanced the budget. We have solved the deficit problem. Lots of talk. No more deficits. Now we have a surplus. Lot of talk. How should we spend it? How should we spend it? Well, we could have tax cuts. We could beef up Social Security. We could beef up existing programs. Several things.

Let us get back to reality, back to the cruel facts. We have a surplus only by using a political definition of "a balanced budget." This definition was designed by the Democrats when they were in the majority to mask the size of the deficit. To our discredit, when we took over control of the Congress, we continued to use a phoney political definition of when the deficit is balanced. And the Republicans continued it, and that is wrong.

From September 30th, 1997, to September 30th, 1998, that is the last fiscal year, the 1998 fiscal year, an honest report showed that that was the first year we said we had a balanced budget. But an honest record shows that we had a \$22 billion deficit in that first year that we balanced the budget. Well, we cannot do both. In fact, the balanced budget was a political definition; and we still do have a deficit.

However, we are on target to balance the budget. Maybe this year. I hope we make it. I am not sure we will. But certainly we are on target for the near future.

Now, as people are lining up now as to how to spend the surplus, whenever it happens, there are several things. Safe Social Security is topmost on the list. But any major talk of the surplus that we will have in a few years must include pay down the debt. We must pay down the debt.

We are paying huge amounts of interest every year on that huge debt. In fact, it amounts right now to about \$270 billion a year in interest. If we can start paying down that debt, then we can lower the interest payments, which gives us more money to pay down the debt, which lowers the interest payments further, and soon we could have enough money to do the job we are supposed to do properly without the kind of things that we see happening now.

So all I am saying, the point of my talk is, this is the time to pay down the debt just as soon as possible. Start paying on it, just a little bit.

As I mentioned, the fiscal year that we first said we balanced the budget we went further in the hole \$22 billion. I called up the Treasury Department and I said, how much does the United States owe on that particular day, September 30, 1997? And they told me. And I said, how much did we owe on September 30, 1998? And they told me. And I used to be a math teacher and I can subtract, even if they are big numbers up in the billions. We over spent by \$22 billion in the first year that we claimed to have balanced the budget.